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MRS. BOBBLE'S TRAINED NURSE

by

George Fox Tucker

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MRS. BOBBLE'S TRAINED NURSE

BY

GEORGE FOX TUCKER

AUTHOR OF "A QUAKER HOME,"
"MILDRED MARVEL," ETC.

1916
ROBERT J. SHORES, PUBLISHER
NEW YORK

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MRS. BOBBLE'S TRAINED NURSE

I

MRS. MALLAD'S MALADY

IT was after dinner, and Mrs. Bobble and I were in the sitting-room, she intent upon her handiwork and I complacently engaged in smoking an ordinary cigar. The lady smote the silence with the observation,

"Perhaps the Mallads are not going to have a trained nurse, after all."

The Mallads, who resided in the neighbourhood, had been only casual acquaintances, until the intelligence of the approaching visit of the stork was announced, and then all the women in the vicinity, including Mrs. Bobble, took a profound interest in the prospective mother, and indulged in all kinds of speculations and conjectures. The whole matter was one to me of little moment. We had as yet no child of our

own, and I regarded the occasional birth of a baby as merely a proper and unavoidable episode in any well-conducted family. I was happily married and took no interest in nurses; but I inferred from the remark "after all" that the matter of the selection of a nurse was one of discussion in the Mallad habitation and also among the now numerous friends of the Mallad family.

I am a lawyer; and, as I watched the convolutions of the smoke which I expelled from my mouth, my faculties became engaged in the contemplation of a law-suit I was to try on the following morning in the police court. It involved only fifteen dollars, but I am conscientious, and make copious drafts upon my energies and zeal even in matters of comparative insignificance. I was aroused — yes, startled by Mrs. Bobble's declaration in a brusque tone,

"Why, Rufus, you don't seem to take any interest in the Mallads."

"Yes, I do, dear," I replied apologetically. "Mallad is an efficient teller in a bank and draws, I suppose, a rather moderate salary; and Mrs. Mallad, I assume from my brief acquaintance, is an exemplary wife and will undoubtedly make a model mother. But nurses, my dear, are out of my sphere."

Mrs. Bobble appeared mollified and resumed,

"It's a matter of economy, you see, and I don't know but that the Mallads are right. They did think of a trained nurse, but twenty dollars a week is a good deal of money for people of limited resources to pay. It seems that they have hit upon a rather happy expedient, so we women in the neighbourhood think. The old nurse, who officiated when Mrs. Mallad's mother was born, some fifty years ago, is still living, and they are going to have her. She will come for six dollars a week and her board, and she will do just as well, I fancy, as one of the graduates of the hospitals."

"Isn't she too old?" I inquired.

"I don't think so. She's seventy-five, but they say she is robust, active, diligent, conscientious, thoughtful and sympathetic as well as inexpensive."

"Does Mrs. Mallad's mother recommend her?" I asked.

"Rufus, Mrs. Mallad's mother died when Mrs. Mallad was only ten days old."

"It was the doctor's fault, I suppose, Nellie."

"I fancy so, Rufus. Doctors were not very intelligent and clever in those days."

I leaned back in the chair and again contemplated the ascending smoke. Then I thought of

what my mother once said about an old-fashioned nurse, whom she knew — that her knowledge of the vocation was confined to hot bottles and heavy blankets, that her touch was like lead, that she was untidy and garrulous, that she took snuff and that her diet was largely of green tea, provided she could get it.

"Rufus," interposed my wife in a few minutes, "do you know what Mr. Mallad wants?"

"No, Nellie, I haven't the slightest idea, unless it's what I want — a little more money."

"I am not alluding to sordid things, Rufus. The question I asked is in keeping with the conversation a moment ago upon an engaging and sentimental subject."

I took all this as reproof and made no reply. I knew that Mrs. Bobble's choler would soon give way to her desire to communicate information upon the absorbing theme. I was right.

"Rufus," she said, "Mr. Mallad wants a girl."

"And what does Mrs. Mallad want — a girl, too?"

"No, Mrs. Mallad wants a boy. It's a very serious matter. If they have a boy, I don't know what Mr. Mallad will do, and, if they have a girl, it may cause Mrs. Mallad poignant grief."

"I'll tell you a way out of it, Nellie. Let

them have twins, one a boy and the other a girl, and then both will be satisfied."

I threw the remnant of the cigar into the cuspidor, stretched back in the chair and laughed heartily. I would not have been so boisterous over my own joke, had I had a larger audience. I felt that there was no harm in ventilating my vanity in the presence of my wife. The lady, however, was offended. She dropped her work and threw into her face an expression of reproach and scorn.

"I think it is too tender a subject to joke upon," she said. "But even if levity be proper, the joke should be a good one."

That stung me, and I retorted rather hotly,

"I meant no disrespect either to the Mallads or to you. I don't see why a harmless pun isn't in order now and then. Besides, Nellie, you never seem to be able to appreciate my witticisms."

"Never seem to be able, Rufus Bobble! Just name a passable joke that you ever perpetrated in your life."

"Listen, my dear. Here is one for which I was responsible to-day. Some one told me of a partnership conducted under the name of Hill & Dale, and I said that, if Hill should run off with the firm's assets and leave Dale stranded and

penniless, it would be a case of up Hill and down Dale."

"Rufus, that is intolerable! Why, if Hill should run away with the partnership property, that would be the end of it. It is silly to try to resort to landscape similes."

I wanted to whistle, but I didn't. I was willing to let Mrs. Bobble think that she was the victor, and that she did so think was evidenced by the readiness with which she resumed her work and by her air of satisfaction and serenity. Presently I asked, not because I wanted to annoy my amiable spouse but more, I suppose, because I felt like saying something,

"How many times have you been over to the Mallads to-day, Nellie?"

I got into a hornets' nest. She exclaimed with flashing eye,

"You don't think I live at Mallads, do you?"

"No, my dear, but you are thoughtful and sympathetic, and so I felt that the Mallad home was just at present the most attractive to you of all places in the world, next to your own home."

She appeared mollified, for she said quietly,

"I went there twice to-day — in the morning to inquire, and in the afternoon to leave some flowers."

"When is the nurse coming?"

"To-morrow."

The door bell rang. We had only one servant and I usually answered the summonses in the evening. There were three ladies on the steps — neighbours, two of them middle-aged and unmarried and one of more advanced years, who had been married three times and never had had any children. Of course they had come to see Mrs. Bobble. I conducted them into the presence of that lady, and, as I knew what they had come for and that they didn't want me there, I left the room.

II

HEARSAY EVIDENCE

FOR the next few days Mrs. Bobble talked of nothing but the Mallads, and I must say that the subject grew monotonous. I approved of interest, solicitude and thoughtful attentions, but I did not want to hear all the time declarations like these, "Mrs. Mallad was better to-day." "Mrs. Mallad took a little walk this afternoon, and it will be the last, I think, for the present," "Mrs. Mallad has taken to literature. She is reading the new book entitled 'The Reflections of a Spinster,'" "Mrs. Mallad wasn't so petulant this morning as she was yesterday afternoon," "Mrs. Mallad, I fear, is getting despondent." And so I was extremely glad on reaching home one evening to learn that the Mallads were rejoicing in the advent of a son. Mrs. Bobble said,

"My data is a good deal inferential, Rufus, although I did get a little information from the cook when I called at the kitchen door. I shall know more when I have a good chat with the nurse. All is well and every one is happy, ex-

cept possibly Mr. Mallad, and certainly he ought not to object to the miscarriage of his whim."

On the following evening Mrs. Bobble had additional intelligence — she had seen and interviewed the nurse. There never was such a baby and there never was such a mother. Everything was going along with exceptional tranquillity, and the little visitor already gave indications of rare understanding. Best of all, the father had conquered his disappointment and had voiced acquiescence in the inevitable. Congratulations were pouring in from the denizens of the neighbourhood, and the nurse affirmed that the child had features of both parents in happy unison.

"A kind of composite prodigy," I observed.

"Yes, Rufus, a kind of composite progeny."

I didn't say anything and I didn't even smile. Mrs. Bobble continued,

"The nurse says that the little fellow has his mother's nose and his father's eyes."

"But how can she say that, Nellie? She hasn't seen his eyes; they aren't open yet."

"What do you mean, Rufus?"

"Why," I replied, "babies are born with their eyes shut, aren't they?"

"Rufus, this is a serious matter, too serious for trifling. You ought to have some sense of shame."

It was my turn to get offended.

"I want you to understand, madam, that I asked that question in good faith. I always supposed that babies were born like kittens with their eyes closed and that they were ten days or two weeks old before the lids parted."

My wife knew by my tone and manner that I was in earnest and that she had affronted me. She was always quick to appease.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Rufus, but I had no idea that any one believed that babies were born sightless or with closed lids. I don't want to augment your displeasure, but the whole thing seems rather funny after all."

The little flurry was over. We got to laughing over the incident, and as our merriment abated, my wife observed,

"Now do let me tell you about the nurse."

"Is she a person of limitations, Nellie, or is she a typical representative of the old-school bearer of balm and dispenser of comfort?"

This last sentence is just as I uttered it. I fancy it doesn't look very good in print, but my wife knew what I meant. The truth is I didn't care half so much about a portrait of Mrs. Mallad's attendant as I did to gratify my wife in affording her an opportunity for the recital.

"Limitations, Rufus, and balm and comfort!

I never saw such a creature in my life. I entered the house through the kitchen and got the cook to go upstairs and ask the nurse if I might see her for a moment. I had expected to behold a motherly individual, and I was quite unprepared for the real presence. She looks every bit her reputed age; she is extremely large and rolls about like a ball when she walks; when the body is at rest the postures are not majestic; her hand wouldn't look good with a sceptre in it, the sceptre would look better than the hand; one may not be imperial and still be interesting, but she was neither; the features produced the impression of stupidity; she had a disagreeable grin and talked incessantly, and her drapery was revolting — it was an old dress drawn up so much in front that the waist was half way up to the throat."

My wife dropped her work, looked up and sighed.

"Rufus," she continued, "there is something so sweet and tender about the birth of a child that you want everything and everybody associated with the event in keeping with high standards of order, decorum and neatness. I don't know as I express myself felicitously, Rufus; but one rusty link spoils the whole chain. I think that most of us have some sentiment in our make-up."

I was about to say, "I don't wonder that the

first Mrs. Mallad had such a hard time of it." But I didn't say it. I merely asked,

"Wouldn't it have been better to pay fourteen dollars more a week for a trained nurse?"

"Perhaps so, Rufus. Poor Mrs. Mallad! She will need tender and constant ministrations for the next two or three weeks. I think the best thing for us women in the neighbourhood, who have already taken such interest in her, to do is to be ready with attention and service."

"That's a beautiful sentiment, Nellie. And it is so good and kind of you to entertain such sympathy for and manifest such interest in your sex, but how do you propose to offer attention and service?"

"I speak for myself, Rufus. I shall go over to the Mallads at least once a day to see what I can do, leaving the matter of my availability to the needs or demands of the moment."

"You won't be allowed to see Mrs. Mallad for some time, will you?"

"I suppose not, Rufus, but still, I think, if the poor woman can stand the nurse, she certainly ought not to be made worse by a brief visit now and then from her neighbours."

III

MINISTERING ANGELS

THE next morning at the breakfast table all we talked about was Mrs. Mallad and the baby. I fancy I didn't do much of the talking, because the subject was one in which I took but little interest; but I asked questions and appeared absorbed simply to gratify my wife, who had once reproved me for indifference. Notwithstanding, all day long Mrs. Mallad, the baby and the nurse kept popping into my head, and I really began to feel that I would like to see two of them — the baby and the nurse — the nurse more than the baby, because after a survey of the creature and a word or two with her, I could satisfy Mrs. Bobble that her engaging theme was not entirely obnoxious to me, whatever I might think of the individual herself. I am not a curious man, but I may say (and still preserve my modesty) that I have a sympathetic nature and that, if it had not been for my profound love for my wife, I should never have given

the Mallads or the baby or the nurse a passing consideration. My wife's solicitude for the young mother and her child stirred my soul to its depths, and I felt sure that there was no one of my acquaintances who possessed so disinterested, affectionate and self-sacrificing a help-meet. Yes, Mrs. Bobble's concern was prompted by the most laudable incentives, and so all day long I was profoundly impressed by her benignity and benevolence.

Towards the end of the day I became restless and nervous and left the office about an hour before the usual time of departure; and, when I reached home, my wife manifested anxiety, fancying I was ill. She saw in my countenance reasons for apprehension, and she inquired if I was not overwhelmed with unwonted embarrassments and perplexities. I assured her that I was perplexed and embarrassed because I didn't have more business — that was all, and I then eagerly asked if she had visited the Mallads during the day. Of course she had visited them. Whether the assurances as to my condition allayed her feelings or my inquiry as to the day's occupations diverted her attention, I cannot aver, but I remember that only one subject now engaged her faculties, and that, in an impassioned tone and in a dramatic manner, she burst forth,

"Rufus, this has been an unusual day for me. I have seen the baby and the mother."

"And the doctor permitted it?"

"The doctor wasn't there. But wait a little while, until we get to the table and then I'll give you the whole story."

I don't know why I was so impatient and expectant unless it was that I was so proud of my wife and so interested in her large-hearted activities. Pretty soon dinner was ready and then there was far more talking than eating.

"You see, Rufus," my wife began, "at ten I had my work all done, so I took some of that jelly left over from last night's dinner and went over to the Mallads, thinking that I could give it to the nurse as a kind of appetizer for the mother."

"Do they allow young mothers to eat jelly?"

"I said as an appetizer, Rufus."

"Oh! I see. And what the mother doesn't use the nurse can dispose of."

"Shame! Rufus! How can you? There! I won't tell you any more about it."

"Yes, you will. Go on, please. I'm interested in the matter because I so appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity."

The good lady was really offended, but the desire to communicate the experiences of the morn-

ing was so pressing that presently she observed, preliminary, of course, to the renewal of the recital,

"You do wrong in interpolating puns, Rufus. You know what I think of them or rather what I don't think of them."

"I accept reproof and am penitent, my dear. Go on, please."

"Well, when I got to the door of the Mallad home, I found the ladies there and we went in together. We went in by the front door, this time."

"What ladies, Nellie?"

"The ladies who were here the other evening,— Mrs. Columbus Evenball, Miss Prune and Miss Penelope Prune."

"Do they take any interest in Mrs. Mallad?"

"I guess you'd think so, if you were a woman and had a sitting with them. Well, we all went in together and the cook, who came to the door, went upstairs and notified the nurse. The creature was as untidy as ever, and, Rufus Bobble, at that moment there came to me a solemn conviction that we ladies were sent to fortify the young mother, to console her, to smooth her pillow, so to speak, and in a certain sense to make up for the deficiencies and shortcomings of the attendant."

"Then you feel, Nellie, that Mrs. Mallad should have had a trained nurse, notwithstanding the expense?"

"I rather think so, Rufus, but we won't go into that now. The Misses Prune had brought something, and even Mrs. Evenball had brought something, too. In each case the object was concealed by a piece of brown paper, and I felt quite proud that the dish containing my jelly was smothered in a nice, clean napkin. As we handed our offerings to the nurse, Mrs. Evenball inquired if there had been any callers yet and we were informed that we were the first. Now I had no idea that we would be permitted to see Mrs. Mallad and was rather surprised when Mrs. Evenball asked if the young mother was able to entertain visitors. We other ladies deferred to Mrs. Evenball, as she was the superior in age, but, if I had been spokesman, I should have asked, considering that it was the first visit, merely to see the baby, although I had no objection to seeing the mother, of course. Indeed I was only too glad to see her. 'You women can go right up,' replied the nurse. 'I guess she can stand it. But I wouldn't stay over half an hour, because she gets tired so easy.' So we tripped up together and were shown into a room about the size of this. The Mallad house is fairly

well furnished downstairs, but the bedroom is provided with pretty scant equipment. The carpet is inferior, the commode is old, the bedstead is a cheap wooden affair, the curtains look second-hand, the bureau is battered, the chairs are different shapes and makes, and seem to be odd-lots, and the wall paper would appear disreputable in an ordinary boarding-house. The other ladies entered first, and they acted just as if they were going to a reception. The nurse said 'Here's some ladies come to see ye, Mrs. Mallad.' We stepped to the bed and looked down upon the recumbent figure."

"How did she appear?" I asked eagerly.

"She appeared to me, Rufus, as if she were ill. I have no doubt she would have risen, if she could, and greeted us cordially, but apparently she didn't feel very prone to social ceremonials, for she said nothing. Mrs. Evenball took a position on the right-hand side of the bed, the Misses Prune on the left, and I stationed myself at the foot. I was the best located for I could look squarely on our dear friend's face and watch its workings. The silence was a little embarrassing. It was broken by Mrs. Evenball, who, leaning forward just a little, said in an impressive tone, 'Mrs. Mallad, you are now a mother.'"

"Do you think she took it in, Nellie?" I inquired, biting my lip to keep from laughing.

"I have doubts, Rufus. The visage remained in repose; the eyes particularly retained their deadened look. Now you see there had been no greetings, and I didn't know but that our hostess was in a kind of stupor. I was at a loss what to do or say when Miss Prune leaned a little forward just as Mrs. Evenball had done and said, 'Tell me, Mrs. Mallad, are you or are you not happy?' The face displayed a gleam of intelligence, dew-drops glistened in the eyes and the lips opened very slowly, and a faint voice said, 'My baby.' Now wasn't it strange that we hadn't thought of the baby before? We didn't have to go and find it. The nurse brought it forward and the clamour began, 'The dear little thing!' 'Oh! Isn't he sweet?' 'How tranquil he is!' 'And so much hair on his head!' 'If he should speak, his words would be those of an angel!' 'He is his own prophecy!'"

"Who made this last remark, Nellie?"

"I think it was Mrs. Evenball."

"What does it mean?"

"I really don't know, Rufus. It sounds now rather ambiguous, but at the time in the fervour of our feelings it seemed very good. Miss Penel-

ope Prune had had nothing to say hitherto, so she leaned over the bed and observed, 'Mrs. Mallad, does your baby resemble your folks or your husband's folks?' There was no response, and the nurse said 'She ain't much on talkin' now, so I'll talk for her. The baby don't look like nobody's folks. He looks just like his father and mother.' Then she ran on with a comparison of eyes, noses and other features in a chirp and discordant tone, to the discomfiture of us all."

"Including the mother, Nellie?"

"Of course, Rufus — including the mother. Indeed I fancied that her face took on an expression of pain, and I thought I heard her murmur 'I'm so tired.' At any rate I began to feel a little conscience-pressure (that word is original with me). What if we were tiring the young mother? Had we not remained long enough? To make matters worse my companions began to chatter like black-birds. They had the nurse hold up the baby, so that they could the more easily point out resemblances, and all of them seemed happy, except poor Mrs. Mallad, who now began to cry. 'Don't cry,' said Mrs. Evenball. 'We know how happy you are, for like others you shed tears as an evidence of joy.' That was a pretty good sentiment, but hardly suitable for the occasion. It occurred to me that the room was

very untidy, and that I ought to do something towards relieving the disorder. So I straightened things out, adjusted the shades, scraped the lint, and, perhaps I ought to say, dirt off the top of the bureau with my hand; and, having leaned over Mrs. Mallad and said a kind word or two to her, I slipped out and came home."

Mrs. Bobble lapsed into silence, and the expression of her countenance, the attitude of her frame and her disinclination to partake of the food before her, reflected perturbation and unrest. I knew that the good creature was troubled and that she would not have alluded to her conscience, had she been entirely satisfied with the morning's occupation.

"Rufus," she declared at last, "I now feel that I ought not to have gone into the bedroom with the others. It is true, as I have said, that I felt just before entering the room that we ladies were sent to fortify and console the young mother and make up for the deficiencies and shortcomings of the nurse, but I must now say, not collectively. The noise and interest distracted the poor little woman, and her cold pinched face haunts me. I never did like Mrs. Evenball and the Prunes, for they aren't over and above burdened with common sense. I fancy that they will make daily visits in the morning, and I'll simply go in

all alone afternoons and tidy things up and try to repair the harm they have done, if any. I propose not to take any notice of Mrs. Mallad unless she takes notice of me."

IV

SOME PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS

TWO days went by and each evening my wife narrated the experiences of the day. She had slipped into the room in the afternoon and had busied herself in setting things to rights but rather against the will and wishes of the nurse, who had been hostile and discourteous. The creature had affirmed that, if there was superfluous dirt on the carpet, it had been tracked in by the women, who came in in the morning and remained till noon, and, as for the rest of the belongings, they needed no attention; she knew, as she had been in the nursing business off and on for fifty years. On the second evening my wife said that Mrs. Mallad's face wore a deathly hue, her eyes had a vacant look and she appeared indifferent to what was going on about her. She also affirmed that she herself was solicitous — indeed frightened — and refrained from speaking to the sufferer, who, she really believed, would have been incapable of responding even if she had been addressed. There was something ominous in Mrs. Bobble's tone; she

partook very sparingly at the table and all the evening pursued listlessly the ordinary occupations and appeared ill at ease and abstracted.

When I reached home on the third evening Mrs. Bobble was in tears.

"Rufus, something awful has happened!" she exclaimed.

Abrupt announcements, preliminary to the presentation of details, always upset me, because they seem to suggest serious mishap or domestic bereavements. We had no children, but my wife herself was there, disturbed it was true, but physically safe and sound, so no harm had come to our little family circle. This was a relief.

"Rufus," she repeated, "something awful has happened!"

"Give it to me softly, gently, dear, in instalments, if you please, so that I may have no trouble in taking it in."

I was afraid that something had happened to my mother-in-law — death perhaps. The lady was an amiable and lovely creature. I loved her with an intensity I cannot find words to convey. I forced into my face what I felt must be an expression of distress and asked in a tremulous tone,

"Is mother dead?"

"No, indeed. She was here this afternoon. It's the Mallads, Rufus."

"Is the baby dead?"

"No, of course not. It's the mother — it's Mrs. Mallad."

"Oh! so sad, and leaving the little baby, too. When did she die, Nellie?"

"Don't be so stupid, Rufus. The woman isn't dead. She's had a relapse and they've had an awful time in the Mallad house. Let me tell you about it. You see, I went over there this afternoon and found a trained nurse in charge, the old nurse having been discharged. I wasn't allowed to see Mrs. Mallad, but was informed that she was in a critical condition and that several times she had been in convulsions. Another trained nurse had been engaged for night service; so everything evidenced apprehension and alarm. The day nurse, with whom I talked, wasn't inclined to be very communicative; so before leaving I went into the kitchen and had a talk with the cook and learned the whole story. It seems that the doctor for the last two or three days had become troubled because the patient wasn't making more progress and had questioned the old nurse pretty sharply as to conditions, environment, service, etc., without getting much satisfaction. The cook said that the doctor had insisted at the outset on the Mallads having a trained nurse, and had only yielded to their entreaties because

of their inability to bear the expense. He had been making his daily call in the late afternoon, but appeared this morning when the visitors were present. The cook regrets that she wasn't there to hear the conversation, but she says that Mrs. Evenball and the Prunes came downstairs in high dudgeon and slammed the door as they passed out. Then the old nurse was sent away, and the new administration was installed."

The recital ended, Mrs. Bobble renewed her weeping and became so violent that, apprehending hysteria, I took her in my arms and endeavoured to soothe her.

"Compose yourself, darling," I declared. "These offended ladies will surely be in this evening and you must dry your tears and cheer up, so as to be presentable. I know how you feel, Nellie. Your present suffering is due to your warm, sympathetic heart. I am proud of a wife, who is swayed by such pure and disinterested emotions. Your thought of others is one of your most commendable traits. But you must remember that the situation is one that cannot be helped and that you are not to blame for it."

Mrs. Bobble shook herself free and exclaimed, "I feel that I am to blame for it — partly at least. My going over there — even if I didn't press Mrs. Mallad into conversation, but en-

deavoured merely to fix up the room — contributed to this unfortunate result and that's what causes me such anguish."

I think what my wife wanted was the assurance from another that she had done no wrong and I gave her a bountiful supply of that assurance. I also gave my opinion of Mrs. Evenball and the Misses Prune, and I fancy that, if those ladies had been present, they would have entertained for me an opinion very similar to that which I assumed they entertained for Mrs. Mallad's physician. Nellie chided me for being too severe upon the ladies, but I surmised that back of it was the sense of propriety only; her agitation abated; her tears disappeared; a smile lighted her visage and we had a pleasant dinner that night after all.

At eight o'clock while we were seated in the sitting-room, I remarked,

"I am not a betting man, but, if I were to take a risk, I would bet that the door bell will ring within five minutes and that the ladies just referred to will be the callers."

Before Mrs. Bobble could reply the bell rang, and I went to the door and ushered in the married mischief maker and her two spinster satellites.

They had no sooner asked if Mrs. Bobble was

at home than they entered without waiting for an answer, and proceeded to the sitting-room, as if they owned the house and had just returned from a constitutional. I was about to retire when Mrs. Evenball asked if I would be kind enough to remain, as they wanted to consult me.

The usual observances upon the meeting of friends or acquaintances were ignored. The ladies were anxious to disgorge. Mrs. Evenball began,

"Mrs. Bobble, you are a fortunate woman."

There was nothing new in the announcement. Mrs. Bobble was a fortunate woman. She was the owner of the house in which we resided — a gift from her father — and she had an exemplary and promising husband. Yet Mrs. Bobble looked puzzled.

Mrs. Evenball went on,

"You are fortunate in that you were not insulted by the physician and ejected from the Mallad residence."

"Indeed, I am fortunate, Mrs. Evenball. Please tell me about it."

"We all went in this morning to be what help we could, just as we have been in mornings since the baby was born. It seems that Mrs. Mallad had had a very bad night and we wanted to comfort and encourage her. I sat down on the bed,

and the Misses Prune stood up and leaned over her. I told her that she looked very much better and I was glad she was gaining strength so fast, that there were compensations for all sufferings, that she would soon be up and out and that the joy and sweetness of life were before her. Just at this moment the doctor came in without being announced, and then the trouble began. I heard him say in an undertone to the nurse, 'Who are these women?' The nurse made some reply and then the doctor came forward and said in a hoarse whisper 'I shall have to ask you all to leave the room.' Think of it, Mrs. Bobble, think of the wretch addressing us without being introduced. We all felt like resenting the insult, but we had compassion for the mother. We knew that noise or disorder might disturb her. We could be ladies, even if the doctor was not a gentleman. We left the room."

And then the babbling began — all these women talking at the same time. The doctor became the mark of a battery of invective, his private life was ruthlessly analysed and his domestic relations were treated with contemptuous criticism. I knew the doctor by reputation. He was one of the ablest in his profession; his life was stainless and his home was a model one. And now the mother came in for consideration. The tu-

mult subsided, and the colloquy became more moderate and orderly.

"Of course," observed Mrs. Evenball, "when I encouraged the mother to feel that she was better, I knew that she was a very sick woman. We must hope for the best, but with such a doctor the case seems hopeless."

Mrs. Evenball's chin began to tremble and the dew moistened her orbs. She went on again,

"I have seen a good deal of sorrow in my life, and I have tried to assuage it. But it is an awful thing to be left without a mother. I was happy in a mother. She lived to be ninety-seven."

"Did she die of old age?" I inquired.

"Yes, of old age, Mr. Bobble."

Mrs. Evenball's tears now flowed more copiously, and the Misses Prune began to sniffle. Would my wife succumb to the contagion? A glance at the dear creature assured me that she was immune. She was never a vulgar woman, but now for the first time in our married existence she conveyed her feelings by an extraordinary act, which was excusable because of the exceptional situation. Mrs. Bobble gave me a wink — a respectable, not a vulgar, wink.

The pause was brief. Miss Prune resumed the colloquy.

"It is an awful thing to be deprived of a mother, but there is another thing to be considered. I don't know much about men, but I assume they have feelings. It is a great responsibility for a man to have a little baby on his hands and no mother to look out for it."

"Time heals all things and time works quickly in most cases," said Mrs. Evenball, who was now brushing the tears from her eyes and cheeks.

"Yes, you are quite right, Mrs. Evenball," observed Miss Penelope, who was tall, thin and distressingly unattractive; "time works quickly and I must say that if a woman feels that she must get married, that is, if she feels that she really needs the discipline, she would do as well with Mr. Mallad as with anybody else, or, in other words, she might go further and fare worse."

I regretted that the author of this dastardly observation was not a man. If she had been, the gentleman might have regretted that he was not a woman. I moved in my chair and Mrs. Evenball, thinking evidently that I was about to rise, declared,

"I trust that you are not going, Mr. Bobble, for we desire to consult you."

"I wasn't thinking of it, Mrs. Evenball. I have been an attentive and instructed listener and

am now obedient to your suggestion or even mandate."

"If there is to be a legal consultation I had better retire," remarked Mrs. Bobble.

"Oh! don't go, Mrs. Bobble. Stay, I beg of you. We ladies want Mr. Bobble's advice and ultimately, perhaps, his aid in a tribunal of justice. We would like to have you remain, Mrs. Bobble, for I have no doubt you may be of help to us, too."

"A capital idea, Mrs. Evenball!" I exclaimed with forced enthusiasm. "I consult with Mrs. Bobble on many of my cases. Mrs. Bobble is my associate counsel."

I gave that lady a glance which had in it a touch of triumph. Her lips moved a little and her eyes sparkled. She told me afterwards that she felt at the time like boxing my ears.

"Mr. Bobble —"

Mrs. Evenball paused. Her expression was not a placid one. The Misses Prune looked even more distressed.

"Mr. Bobble —"

Mrs. Evenball paused again.

"Yes, Mrs. Evenball."

"Mr. Bobble, are — are law-suits expensive?"

"That depends, Mrs. Evenball."

"Depends on what, Mr. Bobble?"

"On the size of the client's pocket-book."

The countenances of the visitors reflected an accession of woe. I was afraid that the fun might terminate; so I said that there were exceptions to every rule and would Mrs. Evenball state her case.

"We want to sue the doctor for his brutal treatment of us."

"Oh! that is an exception to the rule, Mrs. Evenball. A boor like that should be shown up, and, if he is, the disgrace of it will drive him from his profession, as he should be driven from it, and force him to become a motorman or to go into the insurance business. I am a humanitarian and take exceptional cases like this for nothing. I am at your service."

The three humbugs looked relieved and exclaimed,

"Oh! thank you!"

"Now state the case, please," I remarked. "Did the doctor assault you ladies or use harsh and offensive language?"

"Not at all," interposed Miss Prune. "It was worse than that. He hurt our feelings."

"A capital case for litigation." I returned. "Now let me see. I will bring suit for wounded feelings and attach the doctor's house and furniture, horses, carriages, etc."

"I think I ought to tell you," said Miss Prune, "that I was informed a few weeks ago that the house, furniture, horses, carriages, etc., are in the name of the doctor's wife and were given her by her father."

I caught Mrs. Bobble's eye and I inwardly admitted that the triumph was now with her. I didn't care to linger on this unimportant phase of the case.

"Attachments are immaterial!" I exclaimed. "I will bring an ordinary suit, and you ladies will all go to court and testify against the infamous fellow and a large verdict will be rendered against him. Of course we won't recover anything in money because he isn't worth anything, but we will have the satisfaction of showing him up."

Mrs. Evenball stammered,

"Do — you — feel — able — Mr. Bobble —"

I was all attention, inwardly irritated, outwardly serene and absolutely positive that I knew what was in Mrs. Evenball's mind. I surmised that a moderate sense of decency interfered with utterance.

"You — have — had — experience — in — cases — of — this — kind — Mr. Bobble?"

I knew it. To use a colloquial phrase — I had been there before. I proposed to help Mrs.

Evenball without betraying any annoyance and, indeed, with some graciousness of manner.

"Pardon me," I said, "but I think I can safely anticipate your apprehension. I fancy that you feel that your case comes within a branch of the law in which I have had little experience, and that it would be well for me to have senior counsel."

This was a mild way of saying "You think I am young, inexperienced and don't know anything."

"Yes, that is it, Mr. Bobble. I know you have a large practice. I was only wondering whether you have had experience in the matter of injured feelings."

"I have had some experience on the subject — not so much in trying cases as in personal relations with clients. From the dawn of civilisation to this hour of universal enlightenment the lawyer has been held up as the oppressor of his client, and as a foe to mankind, but my experience is that the lawyer is the one who suffers from oppression and imposition, and I believe that the seventy-five thousand members of the profession in the United States will bear me out in the statement that the greatest injuries a lawyer suffers are inflicted by his clients, springing from ingratitude, suspicion, evasion of obligations, etc. Yes, I have had my feelings constantly hurt — so hurt

in consequence of my clients not paying my fees that I have purposely refrained from devoting much time to the treatment of causes which involved the consideration of emotions and sensibilities. You are quite right, Mrs. Evenball. It is proper that I should have senior counsel."

"And will he too, Mr. Bobble —" The lady did not finish the sentence. I was bent on helping her.

"It is a delicate matter, Mrs. Evenball. I applaud your hesitation, for I divine your thoughts. The barrister I shall employ is a man well versed in the matter of injured feelings — not his own, but mine. We were successful in the last case in which I employed him and he kept all the fees, so I think I may be able to prevail upon him to join me in the suit we contemplate without the expectation of remuneration."

Miss Prune observed,

"I understand, Mr. Bobble, that we shan't get any money out of the case, for the reason that the doctor hasn't any property."

"I infer from what has been said that the doctor has no resources. If true, he cannot respond to a judgment. But there is satisfaction in the thought that the vindication of the motives of you ladies and the disclosure of the infamous deportment of the doctor, are results to be more highly

treasured than a whole universe of metallic dross."

The conversation lagged — what there was was not very diverting. The visitors soon departed, and I saw them home, as I had previously done, not with the show and gratification of a gallant, but in obedience to an inexorable duty. As I parted with Mrs. Evenball, she observed,

"If we conclude to sue, Mr. Bobble, we will let you know."

I knew, of course, that I should never hear from them again — I mean in a professional way, but I did hear of them again. I learned that they gave as a reason why they didn't bring suit against the doctor that lawyers charge too much and couldn't be trusted.

V

INTRODUCING ELEANOR AUBREY DE VILLIERS

MRS. MALLAD didn't die, but she had a long and grievous illness. The doctor said that it was all the fault of Mrs. Evenball and the Prunes, but they didn't care anything about it, for they had invaded another man's home and were, doubtless, supremely happy. Mrs. Bobble was nearly every day at the Mallad house bearing delicacies for the patient, whom, of course, she never saw. Weeks slipped by and summer came, and then we learned that Mr. Mallad had hired a little place in the country just for July, August and September, and that his wife and baby were about to be removed to it. So when the time came Mrs. Bobble went over to assist in the preparations for departure, was kindly received and warmly thanked and was, I am sure, of great service. She told me that night a pitiful tale about the appearance of mother and babe. She was informed, however, that both were constantly improving and it was hoped were on the way to recovery.

"And it was all due, Rufus, to the trained nurses. What a benefaction — a blessing — these women are! If I am ever the denizen of a sick chamber, only a trained nurse shall attend me."

I learned in the autumn, when Mrs. Mallad was herself again and the baby was gaining in strength, that the total expenses of the domestic catastrophe were a thousand dollars, a pretty onerous burden to place on the shoulders of a teller in a bank — and that to raise the money Mallad had been compelled to mortgage the house, which stood in his own name and not in that of his wife. He did not come to me to have the papers drawn. If he had, I should not have charged him a cent. At least I feel so now.

And now Mrs. Bobble was invested with a new charm — not that my love gained in depth and constancy. That was impossible, for nothing could augment the intensity of my devotion. Circumstances, however, may awaken solicitude and beget that thoughtfulness which finds expression in the anticipation of wishes and in attentions which afford the recipient diversion or excite new interests or provide comforts. I stole away from my business occasionally to take Mrs. Bobble on little excursions into the country, and I endeavoured to enlighten her on such subjects as horti-

culture and ornithology, but, when I found that she knew more about them than I did, I switched off to generalisations on matters of casual or current importance. I would bring home little gifts, which I thought might touch her fancy, and, if the recognition of my thought for her sometimes lacked cordiality, I had only kind words and a pleasant smile. Evenings she seemed indifferent to the old pastimes of music and delicate handiwork, and she would ask me to read to her, and I would comply with a rendering of some of the choice passages of English literature, to be rewarded more often by petulant criticism or rebuke than by grateful appreciation. But I was all attention, and my feelings were those of ecstasy, tempered by that anxiety, which is inseparable from the interest the husband takes in his wife at the period when she most deserves it.

It was decided that we were to have a trained nurse. The experience of the Mallads made the matter of expense a paltry consideration, and I felt particularly satisfied and secure, because, during the period of my wife's withdrawal from actual administration of domestic affairs, I would be supreme, and the trained nurse might serve as my first lieutenant or, in a certain sense, as my understudy. Under my directions she would, of course, keep people, like Mrs. Evenball and the

Prunes, out of the sick chamber and, if necessary, refuse them the house. And this would be so much better than my having a personal encounter with such undesirable creatures. Alas! how little I knew of trained nurses!

When the young woman came to us I was pleased with her appearance and aspect. She was of fair height and of goodly proportions. She had a round face, attractive features and a smile which served to display faultless teeth. Clad in her regimentals, she reminded me of one of the fancy pictures which accompany the advertisements of cereals or of the school which assumes to teach nursing by correspondence. When she entered the house I treated her with courtesy and deference, in order that she might be at ease and not feel that I regarded her as an inferior. But this precaution didn't work. The truth is she had an air of gracious condescension about her and treated me just as if I were indebted to her considerate indulgence for the rights I had in my wife's house and furnishings. I didn't like it. There was trouble enough already beneath our roof without unnecessary usurpation. She had not been in our home an hour before she knew every room, closet, nook, corner, niche and cranny; and she glided in and out of my wife's chamber with all the insignia of authority and ownership. I think I have re-

marked that my wife said of the first nurse that her hand wouldn't look good with a sceptre in it, but the sceptre would look better than the hand. This woman was evidently born to command. And what do you think was the name she bore — Hannah Berk or Jerusha Padlock or Peace Partridge? Oh, no! It was Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers.

I didn't need any augmentation of my discomfiture. What I wanted was relationships and affinities and atmospheric conditions calculated to allay my feelings and bestow tranquillity. You see there was a measure of selfishness concerned. In solicitude for my wife, I felt that during her temporary abdication I was or ought to be the master of the house and the administrator of all domestic affairs, but I was beginning to realise — no, I will say apprehend that I wasn't to be an important factor after all. I sat down with a heavy heart to my first solitary dinner. The table was a bit of a one. How lovely Mrs. Bobble used to look on the other side of it! How near we were to each other! And how our meals were wont to be enlivened by spice and vivacity and pleasantries! That seemed years ago. How long would it be before she would be restored to me? If — the tears dimmed my eyes. I made an effort to eat. The food seemed

insipid. I left the table and went into the sitting-room and lighted a cigar. I puffed away with furious zeal. It was the only means affording comfort, and I made lots of smoke. Presently a head with its pretty white ornament appeared at the door, and a voice said,

"May I ask you not to smoke, Mr. Bobble?"

"Why?" I inquired.

"Because it gets upstairs into Mrs. Bobble's room."

"Does she object?" I asked.

"Oh! no! Mrs. Bobble doesn't object."

"Then it is all right." I observed. "Thank you for speaking of it, however, Miss Aubrey — Miss de Villiers."

I returned the cigar to my mouth.

The trained nurse entered the room with an air of assurance and said,

"Pardon me, if I say that the doctor objects to smoking."

The doctor was upstairs.

"Oh, I see," I said, as I removed the cigar from my mouth; "the doctor sent you to me."

A little colour came to her cheeks, and I fancied she was annoyed. So was I.

"No, Mr. Bobble. The doctor didn't send me. The matter comes within my own function. Smoking is never allowed, if it is likely to get into

the sick-room. When I referred to the doctor, I alluded to the profession generally. It is part of our instruction in the hospital to prohibit the use of tobacco. It is the system — the method, you know."

"You are quite right," I observed, and I parted with the weed. Yes. She was right, and I shouldn't have smoked at all; but there was something about her mien that made me feel that I was a subordinate instead of being master of my wife's house.

I threw myself back in the chair and endeavoured to give myself up to meditation — to think of something besides the situation so fruitful of apprehension and uncertainty — but it was impossible to fix my thoughts on other subjects. At last I resolved to relieve my unrest by invoking remembrances of our early relations. My heart was so full of gratitude to my wife for the happiness I had enjoyed from the treasure of her love that I thought the most fitting recognition was an enumeration of all her acts of affectionate devotion and thoughtful service. I couldn't remember that we had ever had a quarrel. (We had had a lot of them.) I thought of her patience and forbearance and wondered how she had ever been able to live with me. From exalting her I began to belittle and defame myself.

I charged up faults and transgressions, the punishment for which is incarceration in the penitentiary. If another had so assailed my character, I would have haled him before the magistrate. To seek relief from dejection and misery I rose and went into the hall and began to walk to and fro with a step which I fancied was as light as a fairy's. It wasn't long before Miss Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers appeared, and, leaning over the baluster, said,

"Excuse me, Mr. Bobble, but may I ask you to discontinue your exercise?"

"Does it disturb Mrs. Bobble?"

"Mrs. Bobble hasn't spoken of it, but I have no doubt it annoys her. You will overlook the precautions I take, Mr. Bobble, but it is the duty of the trained nurse to let nothing affect or minimise her allegiance and fidelity to the patient."

I wanted to say that that remark sounded like a quotation, but I didn't. I acquiesced and returned to the sitting-room. I knew that, if I went to bed that night, sleep would not visit me. I tried to read but the effort was mechanical. My eyes conveyed nothing from the printed page to the muddled brain. Then I lapsed into a kind of stupor and when I came out of it — I don't know how long I was in it — I concluded to prepare for the night. The preparation con-

sisted of making the room secure from intrusion. There were two doors — one leading into the hall and the other into the dining-room. I locked them both. I don't think they were ever fastened before, for the keys rebelled a little against interference with their repose. Now I was alone. My wife was so near and yet so far away. What if I were needed at any time and it was discovered that I had locked myself in the sitting-room? What would Miss de Villiers think? She would assume that I was crazy. Then I said to myself that I didn't care what she thought, and I concluded to mitigate my anxiety and bewilderment by taking a little stroll in the vicinity of the house.

The reason why I didn't go out by the front door wasn't that I was afraid of the nurse; it was that I might theoretically disturb my wife. I knew that I could go out of the front door as deftly and as quietly as a burglar enters through a window. I proposed to depart by the kitchen door, but I must first release myself from imprisonment. The keys were obstinate, and the turning of them made a good deal of noise. As I stepped into the dining-room, there stood Miss Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers, her countenance stamped with what I call a vocal expression. It seemed to say "What's the matter with you?

Don't you know that I can't attend to you and your wife at one and the same time?" I didn't say anything, but made for the kitchen. I was careful. I left the house and closed the door without making a sound. It was intensely dark. There was a street-lamp not far away, but its light fell short of the spot where I was standing. I started to take a stroll when, despite the gloom, I espied something moving on the opposite side of the street. It was very indistinct, but presumably human — perhaps a burglar or a highwayman. To my surprise the uncanny object seemed to approach, and, as I am strong and athletic, I did not quail but patiently awaited its arrival. I was prepared to put my fist in commission, when a surly voice inquired, "Who are you and what are you doing on the street at this hour of the night?" From the tone of authority I would have taken the fellow to be a policeman, but I knew from his alcoholic breath that he must be a civilian, for I was sure that no policeman was ever known to take a drink during business hours. I could hear him fumbling in his pocket, and I fancied that he was drawing a revolver. I was mistaken. He was reaching for a match, and he found it and effected ignition by rubbing it on his trousers. As he held it to my face the surprise was mutual. The fellow was a police-

man after all, and he recognised me with the salutation, "Excuse me, but I wouldn't have stopped you if I had known that you were Mr. Bobble, the distinguished lawyer." This so enraged me that I really did feel like using my fist, for, while it is always pleasant to be known and recognised, it is very disagreeable to be called "distinguished" when you know that the other fellow doesn't mean it. I gave him a look of scorn, but he didn't see it for the match had gone out, so I resumed the walk. My stay in the sitting-room must have been longer than I thought, for a neighbouring clock rang out the mid-night hour. The tone seemed to call to me to go home, and home I went with my burden of discomfiture and dreariness and dread. I stole into the house and into the sitting-room, without being detected, as I thought. Now let me say that I stole in in the dark — I didn't want, of course, to disturb my wife, and I didn't want another encounter with the nurse. To go to bed was impossible. I proposed to locate in the easy chair for the rest of the night. Presently I was conscious of an object at the door. It loomed up in the dark like the aforesaid policeman, and I really thought it was he. I was disabused by the inquiry of Miss Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers,

"Is that you, Mr. Bobble?"

"Yes, Miss de Villiers."

"Oh! you don't know how satisfied I am! I heard you when you came in, and I thought that it might be an intruder."

I said in a solemn tone,

"Good night, Miss de Villiers."

"I think you are wrong, Mr. Bobble. Another day has broken upon us. Good morning, Mr. Bobble."

The inquisitive creature disappeared and I was alone. I think I may have slept a little before morning, but not much. The first day was a welcome visitor, but I was still miserable and depressed. I wanted to go to the bath-room to make my toilette, but was reluctant to do so, as I apprehended an encounter with Miss Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers. So I went to the kitchen. I asked the cook if I might have the freedom of running water and the sink, and the cook grinned. My preparations for the day had hitherto been general; these were necessarily limited. I said with grateful emphasis,

"I thank you, Lizzie, for your kindness, and I congratulate you that you are free from intrusion."

I didn't know what I was talking about, for it turned out that it wasn't long before the nurse owned the kitchen as well as the rest of the house.

I remember sitting down a little later at the breakfast table, and I remember that I broke an egg and dropped the contents in my coffee-cup. The rest of my experiences at that solitary meal are indistinct. I recall that I got into the entry and was confronted by Miss de Villiers. I asked her if all was well in the sick chamber, and I was advised that all was well. I asked if I could be or do any good about the house, and was informed in unequivocal phrase that my absence would be more agreeable than my presence. I felt that I would be more satisfied to have my wife order me out of the house given her by her father than to have Miss de Villiers politely tell me to quit it. As I started for the door Miss de Villiers observed,

"Pardon me, Mr. Bobble, but I assume that you are not expected before six to-night, and I trust that you will not use the telephone at all to-day."

"Why, I always use the telephone in my office, Miss de Villiers."

"I don't mean that, Mr. Bobble. I mean calling up the house. It disturbs the patient."

"Did Mrs. Bobble say so, Miss de Villiers?"

"No, indeed. But it is the system — the method — you know."

"A proper precaution, Miss de Villiers," I

observed, and I got out into the street as quickly as I could.

When I entered the office Miss Mallybore, the stenographer, appeared alarmed. At least she stared at me as if she thought that I was suffering from unwonted anxiety or some sudden disorder. I went into the inner room feeling that it was best for me to keep employed as a preventive of introspection or rather of the tendency to grieving and turbulent cogitations. I began the morning's work by sending notices to various people stating that I had bills against them left with me for collection and requesting them to pay the same. I had a printed form of demand, but I didn't care to use it, nor was I in the mood to dictate to Miss Mallybore. My humour was for writing, and I scribbled off letter after letter with such diligence and enthusiasm that, for the time being, my thoughts were diverted from my wife. The writing of the last letter gave me exceptional satisfaction — not that it was a finished literary production, but because its composition was inspired by a sense of justice and fair play. It was as follows:

"*Mr. Alexander Bletcher.*

"DEAR SIR: A claim against you for $1.64 has been placed in my hands for collection. It

is for your last month's wash-bill. The female creditor — a widow with four little children — is in poor circumstances, and the retention in your pocket of money which belongs to her is as much to your discredit as it is to her detriment. I demand and expect liquidation of the claim, and, if you are a gentleman, you will pay it immediately,

"Yours etc."

I gathered up the epistles and went out in the entry and dropped them in the chute. And now the perturbation — the feeling of goneness and the inclination to petulance and complaint — returned. I felt that I didn't want to see anybody or converse with anybody, and I didn't want to go back to the office and go to work. But duty was imperative. As I re-entered, Miss Mallybore greeted me with a look of distress and anxiety, which, I fancied was inspired by my own wretched aspect. She rose and declared,

"Pray don't think me officious, Mr. Bobble, but I apprehend that you are not very well. Have no hesitation in calling upon me for any aid that it is in my power to afford. If you would like to go for the day, I will endeavour to look out for the office."

Miss Mallybore was not accustomed to ad-

dress me unless I first accosted her, and the infraction of the rule was probably justified in her opinion by my unusual appearance. I was annoyed yet conscious that the voluntary offer was well intended. I should have merely expressed gratitude and declined, but I put my foot in it by answering,

"I thank you, but I am as well as can be expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Bobble is the cause of my anxiety. She is at home in the hands of a doctor and a trained nurse."

"Oh! how sorry I am, Mr. Bobble! Surely you are needed at home. Have no hesitation in leaving your affairs with me. I will prove a willing, if not efficient, substitute."

"Alas! Miss Mallybore, I can't go home."

"Don't you know the way?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes, I know the way, Miss Mallybore, even if I am a little unhinged mentally. But the truth is, they don't want me there. I can't go home. I'm a man."

From Miss Mallybore's astonished look I was sure that she thought I was crazy. There was no way but to out with it.

"Miss Mallybore," I said, "I can dispel all doubt in a brief statement."

I hesitated and then declared,

"Miss Mallybore, I have to say that Mrs. Bobble is about to become a mother."

I anticipated a scene. I felt that if Miss Mallybore had been an English, Irish, Scotch, French, German or any other woman than an American she would acknowledge the intelligence with a few tender and sentimental words. But she was an American with, I supposed, the proneness of her country-women to prudery, and the proper thing of course, for an unmarried American woman, when a married American man informs her that his wife is about to become a mother, is to faint, to have a fit or to go into hysterics. The dénouement exalted Miss Mallybore in my estimation and caused me to place her in the companionship of English, Irish, Scotch, French, German and other women not given to puerile affectations. A tear dimmed each eye, and the face just glimmered with a smile, as she said,

"How beautiful, Mr. Bobble! Of course, I appreciate the situation, and shall not press my proffer of assistance."

I shut myself up in the inner office feeling better than I had felt in the last twenty-four hours, and the cause of it was Miss Mallybore's gracious and fittingly worded interest. But the unrest and discomfort soon reasserted authority, and the morning passed without a definite thought find-

ing a lodgment in my brain or without a single tangible thing accomplished. I went out at the lunch hour not for food but to walk the streets, and I returned unrefreshed in body and unrelieved in mind. The afternoon dragged along as the morning had done. No work was performed, and no clients invaded my solitude. At five I was called by phone and the following colloquy occurred:

"Who is it?"

"It's me."

I knew by the voice and by the inelegant English that the man at the other end of the line was my father-in-law, Alexander Bletcher. He was not a college graduate. If he had been, he would have said, "It's I," and he very probably would never have been a successful business man.

I said,

"Well?"

"Rufus, what did you mean by sending me that letter?"

"I haven't sent you any letter, sir."

"Here's one in my hand, signed with your name and demanding that I pay my wash-bill."

"Oh! fa —"

I stopped. I never had addressed him as father, although I was accustomed to speak of his wife as mother. It seemed as if there was

a bomb in my head and that it was about to explode. The horrible realisation of the blunder I had made was unbearable, but I straightened up and endeavoured to summon my dislocated mental parts into conjunction and unison.

"It's a mistake, Mr. Bletcher — an awful mistake. I meant that letter for another man."

"Why didn't you address it properly, then? Do you suppose that I am going to submit to such insults and continue to give you my business?"

If he should withdraw his business, I would be just as well off. I didn't make anything out of him. I didn't say that, however, for I remembered that he had put the house in my wife's name.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Bletcher; but you know that I am terribly depressed just now by an exceptional domestic incident, and am really irresponsible. Didn't you feel, when my wife was born, just about the way I am feeling now?"

I heard him "haw" "haw," "hum" and then came the observation,

"It isn't very nice to talk that way over the telephone. I am inclined to overlook the blunder this time, but it must never happen again. The meanest part of the insult is the amount named in the letter. I pay much more than one dollar and sixty-four cents a month for my wash."

Then came the grating sound which shows that the man at the other end of the line has hung up the receiver. I felt like one just rescued from drowning.

VI

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR!

AN hour was to elapse before I was expected home — before I had the right to enter the house. Surely I was no good in the office. Then where should I go and what should I do? Pretty soon I had it. I went into the outer office and said,

"I propose to leave affairs with you, Miss Mallybore. I am going to take a long walk and then go home."

Stepping to the window and looking out in an indifferent way, as one is wont to do, suddenly I was startled and uttered a cry of alarm.

"Why, Miss Mallybore," I declared, "you see the two buildings on the opposite side of the street — they have changed places. How did that happen?"

"Isn't it an optical illusion, Mr. Bobble?"

"I don't know but that it is, Miss Mallybore. At any rate it is time for me to go."

I was ashamed and only too ready to depart. I cannot remember much about that walk, but I

do remember that I was at the door of my wife's house precisely at six o'clock and that I entered with a heart beating tumultuously and with a head tormented with anxiety, yet hopeful of grateful information.

How quietly I opened the door, and how stealthily I entered the house! Surely this time I would not encounter Miss de Villiers, but there she was just at the foot of the stair-case. Her garb never appeared more immaculate, her attitude more stately and engaging, and her countenance freer from the traces of care and solicitude. I ought to have divined the reason for it, for one whose face is lighted by a smile when you would expect to see it bear the marks of sleeplessness and fatigue, is assuredly the exponent of a heart bubbling over with joy and eager to communicate welcome intelligence. She took a step forward and displayed her beautiful teeth, as she declared,

"Mr. Bobble, it's a boy."

I sprang to the stair-case and went up three steps at a time, and in a few seconds was at the door of my wife's chamber. Instantly an arm was stretched out to bar my entrance, and I was notified in a low but firm tone,

"Excuse me, but you can't go in there."

The informant was Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers. How she passed me and got to the thresh-

old I never knew, but there she was. I think she enjoyed this assertion of authority. I didn't.

"Why not, Miss de Villiers? Why can't I go in there?"

"Because it's the method — the system, Mr. Bobble."

There wasn't a trace of the recent smile. The eyes were lustrous, the cheeks slightly inflamed and the air was not without a suggestion of defiance.

"Do you mean to tell me that I can't go in and see my wife and son — my heir?"

"Yes, Mr. Bobble."

"But I have a right in there. It is my prerogative. I am sure that my wife desires to see me; and my baby, too, if he could only speak, would call for his papa. Besides they are all alone and the presence of the husband and father at a time like this adds the last touch of light and colour to the sweetest of all domestic pictures."

I thought this bit of rhetorical sentiment a happy substitute for an outburst of indignant protest, and fancied that it would fetch her, but it didn't. She merely said,

"Your wife and baby are not alone."

"Who's in there, the doctor?"

"No, the doctor is so satisfied with his patient that he won't come again until morning."

"Is it Mrs. Evenball or one of the Prunes?"

"I don't know the ladies, but that doesn't matter. They aren't in there. Pardon me, Mr. Bobble, but may I ask you to moderate your tone? A responsibility rests on the trained nurse to see that the patient's home is free from tumult."

Although this observation was extremely distasteful, I restrained my emotion and asked in a hoarse whisper,

"Who is in there, please?"

"Your mother-in-law, Mrs. Bletcher."

Ordinarily I would have said, "Call her mother," but I was too absorbed to dally with gentle proprieties.

"If Mrs. Bletcher has a right to be in there, why haven't I?"

"Because you haven't any pass."

"Good heavens!" I declared. "Must I have a pass to go in and see my wife and child?"

"Why, certainly, that's the method — the system, you know. In this advanced age of therapeutical science orderly administration of affairs in the sick-room is the most important factor in the promotion of convalescence."

"Has mother a pass?"

"Mrs. Bletcher appealed to the doctor, when I forbade her to enter, and he gave her a card, which suffices until revoked."

"I suppose you visé it every time she enters just like a pass-port."

"I haven't yet, for she's been in there about the whole day, so I haven't had an opportunity."

The woman was strong, but I was stronger, and I was sure that I could easily put her aside and enter the room which contained my possessions. But violence was not to be considered. I had hitherto believed that the best act of my life was in exchanging the ennui of bachelorhood for the munificence of a woman's love. But the enjoyment of that love, at a moment when its fervour was most assured and its significance the most impressive, was thwarted by another woman, who was temporarily in the house on wages and who had no claim upon its occupants by kinship, association, or even long and unpaid service. The suspense became more acute and the longing for my treasures more importunate, but, unfortunately, the doctor would not come till morning, and no way was provided for the intervention of a mediator or for leaving the matter out to arbitration. I was like the man who is about to buy a ticket at a railway station and suddenly finds that he has lost his pocket-book, or like the itinerant, who looks wistfully at the vicarious provender in the window of a restaurant and then

is prevented from entering because he is habited in objectionable raiment.

"Will you please tell Mrs. Bletcher that I would like to see her?"

"Certainly."

This word was not uttered like a servant, but as if the declarant was obliging only as an act of condescension and as if she were sacrificing dignity or losing caste by departing from customary duties. I tried to peek in, but she entered so dexterously that I only had a hasty and unsatisfactory survey. Mother appeared with a not very engaging aspect, and apprehension of an unfavourable turn in affairs was at once kindled. I was assured, however, that all was well, that the mother (I mean my son's mother) was exhilarated with joy, and that the little fellow was lusty, of beautiful and commanding countenance, of lithe and graceful form and of supposed superior intelligence. There came a cry from the chamber,

"Is the nurse hurting the baby?" I asked, angrily.

"No! No! Rufus. The little creature is taking his first lesson in the development of the organs of respiration."

"I guess you mean the lungs, mother."

The lady did not reply. She seemed to be musing. I disturbed the spell by asking,

"Will you do me the honour to dine with me in about fifteen minutes?"

"I accept with pleasure, Rufus."

She put her hand on the knob and was apparently about to turn it, when I asked solicitously,

"You can't go in there without showing your pass, can you?"

"I rather think I can," was the answer in a snappy tone; and she went in and left me alone. I am not going to ask the reader to picture a man's homelessness in his wife's home and I am not going to dwell on the distasteful theme.

Mrs. Bletcher met me at the board — the repast was entered upon without any punctilious preliminaries and proceeded for a while without the superabundant converse which so often enlivens feasts and gatherings. Soon Mrs. Bletcher, as her hunger was appeased, began to warm up and become communicative. She informed me that she was happy because of the satisfactory situation of matters in the house, even if she didn't look so, that she had arrived early in the day and had had a terrible time with Miss de Villiers, that she had appealed to the doctor and had written a pass herself and had insisted on

his signing it, and he had done so, more as a joke, perhaps, than anything else, that all this was intended to shame the nurse but that she had maintained an indifferent demeanour and had attended to her duties with clock-like regularity and noteworthy precision, that the young woman's visits to the kitchen had resulted in more than one misunderstanding with Lizzie, that when my wife was born she (Mrs. Bletcher) was still mistress of the house and that the nurse, who was of the old school, played second fiddle, and that she (Mrs. Bletcher) was going to take charge of my wife and son during a part of the night and let Miss de Villiers get the sleep she so much needed.

"Mother, you are a good woman. Dissatisfied as you are with this benign attendant, yet you are willing to make sacrifice and undergo hardship that she may enjoy the benefaction of needed slumber."

"I wasn't thinking so much of that, Rufus, as I was of getting a chance to be alone for a while with my daughter and grandson."

I think my respected mother soon regretted the remark, only so far, of course, as it reflected on the nurse, for, just as we were about to rise from the table, she said in the tone and with the emphasis so indicative of sincerity,

"I ought to be fair, Rufus. It is hard to abandon old views and long established usages, but I appreciate the fact that we must give them up when it is right to do so. We used to think the former system of nursing approached perfection, and the recent advent of these trained creatures elicited everywhere pretty severe criticism and aroused hostility. But after all I suppose the new method is preferable."

Mrs. Bletcher smiled and, dropping her voice as one will do to call particular attention to or emphasise a sentiment, continued,

"I assume, Rufus, that you've often heard it said that there isn't a house in the land large enough for two women to live in."

Mrs. Bletcher departed, and I repaired to the sitting-room and stretched out in my easy chair. I was feeling better now — at least all was well so far as the condition of my wife and boy was concerned, and the time seemed meet for indulging in reverie. I attempted to draw a mental picture of my son's infancy, boyhood and mature years. He was winsome and precocious at the start, and in every phase and action gave promise of a brilliant career. This was as far as I got. The door bell rang. It was one of those sharp, snappy rings, which give the impression that the outsider is not only anxious to get in, but that he

feels that the right of entrance is his prerogative. I went to the kitchen and said,

"Lizzie, you know I attend the front door evenings, but I want you to go there on a special mission now. You are aware also that Mrs. Bobble and I are always fair in the treatment of servants. I should say servant, Lizzie. If you do any extra work, we give you extra compensation. Take this ten cents, and go to the front door. I am a diviner, if you know what that means. You will find there three women — Mrs. Evenball and the Prunes. They will insist upon going up to Mrs. Bobble's room. By no means allow it, but go quietly upstairs and summon Miss de Villiers. In the meantime I will look out for the kitchen."

Lizzie looked credulous. I fancied that she thought that ten cents was rather meagre compensation for getting into a scrap for which she wasn't responsible. I added another dime, and she departed. On her return she was laughing immoderately, and in broken phrases told me that the women had entered as if they owned the house, that they had insisted upon being conducted to Mrs. Bobble's chamber, but that she had prevented them, after encountering considerable abuse, and had summoned the nurse; that an altercation had ensued and had ended in the sup-

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pression of the visitors, and that they had departed in anything but an amiable spirit. Lizzie continued,

"That's the only good thing I've seen that Villain woman do since she came into the house, Mr. Bobble. To tell the truth, sir, I thought to-day of giving notice and would have done so, if it hadn't been for poor Mrs. Bobble. That Villain woman came in here — right into this kitchen — and acted as if she owned it and owned me, too. Now, Mr. Bobble, I wasn't hired to be ordered round by a woman who isn't my boss. I feel as if I was the queen of the kitchen in the presence of the likes of her. If she would only say 'please this' and 'please that,' I wouldn't mind. The next time she comes here I'll let her know she ain't no better than I be."

"Gently, Lizzie, gently. In about three weeks will come deliverance for us all. I know you won't desert us in the hour of need. After her departure a baby voice will give commands, and we shall all rejoice in the advent and domination of a new sovereign."

Lizzie apparently didn't comprehend the meaning of my utterance, but I fancy she thought it rather high-toned and apposite, for her features ripened into a smile, which I took to be acquiescence.

I returned to the sitting-room and sat down indifferently when my eye caught these words on the cover of a magazine entitled the *Monthly Entertainer:*

THE $5000 PRIZE STORY
EVA AND THE TRAINED NURSE
IN THIS NUMBER

I had no employment and I was hankering for additional information upon the subject of trained nurses, so I opened the periodical and began to read with avidity.

VII

EVA AND THE TRAINED NURSE

THE brief and diverting romance was as follows: —

EVA AND THE TRAINED NURSE

By Miss Mehitabel Bakeshift

[The editor desires to accentuate a remarkable circumstance in the selection by able and disinterested judges of this charming story as the best and most desirable of five thousand competitive contributions. The committee of three was unanimous in its judgment, and, as its members in reading the offerings were not permitted to know the names of the authors, the merit of the system and the wisdom of the choice are amply demonstrated in the selection of the contribution of Miss Mehitabel Bakeshift, who has long been a constant and conspicuous writer for these pages. This coincidence is extremely significant and conveys the assurance that the *Monthly Entertainer* continues to maintain the position, to which it is so eminently entitled, as the leading magazine in the land.]

For forty years Eva and her mother had enjoyed the felicities of female fellowship under an ancestral roof. It was a beautiful house, supposed to have been built by one of the passengers on the *Mayflower*, and was located at a spot where a

happy distribution of natural objects heightened its imposing form and comely proportions. Nearby a miniature forest lifted its umbrageous shade or rather its verdant canopy; and a little brook, bound on its petulant mission to a distant river, resembled a silvery band — the more noticeable from the profusion of wild flowers which overspread the banks. Nor were other rural features wanting. There were meadows dotted with kine, and fields green with corn, potatoes, cabbages and other herbaceous plants designed and useful for culinary purposes. At the rear of the house was a barn, a corn-crib and shed — all resplendent with their coats of white-wash. Such is a picture of the residence and environment of these noble women.

Eva had had a father but he died when she was only ten years old. He was a man of Websterian mien and Chesterfieldian manners, and had contemplated writing his autobiography — indeed had begun it, when death withdrew the pen from his frigid digits. It is to be regretted that he did not live to finish the story of the experiences he had had and of the vicissitudes he had encountered, for, as he had inherited his money and had never done a day's work, the recital would have been replete with information, both fascinating and valuable.

One day this courtly gentleman was seized with a violent pain, and mother and daughter took turns in rubbing his back. But they failed to assuage the suffering or relieve the disorder. A physician was called and, after a lengthy diagnosis, he pronounced the trouble — well, kind reader, we must call it by the name it bore in those sedate days — inflammation of the bowels. Times were not so high-toned and aristocratic then as to demand the nomenclature of appendicitis. The physician, who was a wise and learned individual, proceeded to doctor the patient's stomach, but skill was unavailing. The man died.

And now thirty years, crowded with happiness, flitted by and Eva was forty and her mother sixty-eight.

One day the mother observed,

"Eva, I have a pain in my side. At first I thought it was in my heart, but I am too old to have any disturbance again in that necessary organ."

"It is inflammation of the — is it appendicitis, mother?"

"Verily I believe it is, dear child."

So Eva summoned a physician, and he pronounced the patient on the dangerous list.

"It is appendicitis," he declared. Then, after

a few moments of profound thought, he inquired of Eva,

"Does this fell malady run in the family?"

And Eva answered, "My father died of appendicitis, although it was then called by a different name."

"That accounts for it," said the learned man. "Your mother inherited the complaint from your father. We must work quickly. Before I operate, a trained nurse must be called."

Eva was anxious for the immediate engagement of the trained nurse, but her enthusiasm was somewhat chilled when she asked and was given an estimate of the expense.

"Is the nurse a necessity?" she inquired. "The compensation seems excessive. Why, I understand that the October number of the *Journal of Congress* for 1776 contains a resolution providing 'that the wages of nurses in the United States be augmented to a dollar a week.'"

"Yes, my child, the nurse is a necessity, despite the amount of her wages. Let me illustrate," said the learned man. "Sepsis is grasped to-day in a way unknown to early Æsculapian experimentalists, and modern bacteriological knowledge is a mountain of remedial erudition when compared to the ancient mole-hill of prophylactic ignorance. These marvellous advances in thera-

peutical wisdom demand the co-operation of an intelligent and efficient servitor, and, through the processes of rigid discipline and the accretions of unretarded evolution, the devotee of Hippocrates and Galen has found that servitor in the indispensable creature known as the trained nurse."

"You convince me, doctor, and I assent. But let it be an elderly female, for I do not want a young woman in the house."

"All trained nurses are young women, my child."

"Sorrows thicken and misfortunes increase. Let the creature come," said Eva.

So the doctor engaged a gazelle, and she with her belongings was transported to the house in a hack. Of course she was not one of the doctor's favourites, but, even if she had been, she would have been amply able to meet all the requirements.

Ah! little did Eva and her mother, affording in their domestic association and angelic fellowship the loftiest pattern of maternal and filial solicitude and devotion, realise that the intrusion of the trained nurse would for the time being sever the ties which they had thought indissoluble, and establish a new system of order and discipline in the house. I mention the mother, but I should say that she was in some measure indifferent to

the usurpation, because she profited by its exercise and was rendered occasionally oblivious to episodes and surroundings by anesthetics and opiates. Eva was not so fortunate.

The newcomer was, to be sure, of athletic build and of comely countenance. By her air and bearing, and by her short, pithy phrases she produced upon Eva the impression that she was in her own opinion what is called in colloquial language "the real thing." Arrayed in her uniform and ready for action, she was indeed very sightly and charming, although to Eva there was suggested the resemblance to an Amazon.

"I will show you the house," said Eva.

"I thank you for your proffered service," was the reply, "but it is quite unnecessary. I know by intuition every house in which I am employed, and my authority is never questioned, except occasionally in the kitchen."

And thus did the trained nurse promulgate her constitution and by-laws. This promulgation was, as just indicated, only of a general nature. There was no declaration of specific articles. It is reported that trained nurses have an organisation and that no outsider has ever read in detail the provisions of its constitution and regulations, although rumour has it that the first article of the constitution reads as follows:—

ARTICLE 1. It is the duty of the trained nurse to exercise the utmost vigilance in guarding her charge's chamber from the intrusions of heirs-at-law and next of kin.

The first clash came when Eva was about to enter her mother's room. The nurse declared,

"You can't go in there."

The tone was emphatic and the manner that of conscious supremacy. Eva asked the reason for her exclusion, and was informed that there was no obligation to enlighten and no disposition to discuss. The day passed drearily for Eva, and the night bestowed no rest. At an early hour in the morning she seated herself in a chair in the hall near the door of her mother's chamber, and, as the nurse emerged, inquired, "Is all well?" With a disdainful look, the reigning angel replied that the patient's temperature was so and so, respiration so and so, and pulse so and so, and would say no more. Another melancholy day and troubled night. On the morning of the second day Eva asked again, "How fares it with my mother now?" And again the guardian answered condescendingly, "Calm and tranquil, serene and resigned — only one wrinkle on her pillow." Joyously the hours passed until the morning of the third day, when Eva voiced again

her deep concern in her mother's welfare, and the nurse with cutting brusqueness said,

"Your mother does not care to see you now; indeed, I think she has forgotten all about you, and you must seek another boarding-place."

And then Eva rose in her majestic indignation and declared,

"For forty years my mother and I have lived in this house, and never before has hand of man — I should say woman — been lifted to estrange us. I only weigh about a hundred and ten pounds, and you must weigh at least a hundred and sixty — indeed you are big enough and plump enough to be a good candidate for matrimony, and you ought to be tending a man and not waiting on a woman. But trained nurse or no trained nurse I'm going in that room to see the mother who bore me and brought me up."

There was the prospect of what they call in common parlance a scrap. Eva's umbrage again sought vent.

"Besides, when my father died, he gave everything to me, with the understanding that I would care faithfully, lovingly and tenderly for my mother. So I have done, so shall I do in this house, which belongs to me. I pay the bills. Is there anything more to be said?"

"A light breaks in upon me," said the now

enlightened watch-woman. "You may come and go at pleasure, but only, I trust, when I am not in the room. I must make an outward show at least of observance of professional requirements. I will now hie me to the kitchen to quarrel with the cook."

The mother and daughter were reunited, the trained nurse was reduced to subjection and ultimately paid off, the mother recovered, and happiness thereafter reigned in the home.

As I finished this enchanting tale, I wondered how a human mind could ever invent the wonderful episodes and situations, arrange them with such skilful conception of sequence and then clothe them in language unequalled for felicity and elegance. I assumed that, while this masterpiece was the best of the five thousand stories, the others were also of a high literary order, and I thought, not without a touch of envy, that the three disinterested judges must have derived infinite pleasure from reading the four thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine contributions, which they rejected.

And now there was a recurrence of profound interest in my immured possessions. I was urged to go to them by a masterful impulse and was only restrained by the apprehension that my pres-

ence might by disturbing the system or method bring some mishap upon or cause some injury to mother and child. Morning seemed far away and there was little abatement of the unrest, and no inclination to contemplate or court the sleep I needed almost as much as Miss de Villiers did. I required a sedative and found one. It was more than a sedative — it was a regular opiate. Mrs. Bobble had made all kinds of preparations in anticipation of the birth of the boy, and among other things she had installed a little library of volumes on the joys, duties, demands and obligations of motherhood. I took up one of them entitled "The Mother and the Baby — how to Care for and Bring up the Little One." I found the book was from the pen of the great authoress, Theodora Lusherhead, and that, (according to the title page), it had reached the 167th edition. Of course, what the title page said was true.

Theodora was a maiden lady of some sixty summers, and hence particularly qualified to write upon the most advisable methods to be employed in the rearing of children. However, I had not proceeded far in the perusal of her book before I became conscious of the causes of its marvellous circulation — it was used as a medicine to produce somnolence. I had difficulty in keeping my eyes open. I assumed that Miss de Villier's

eyes were also not open, and that it was a good time to get to bed without much probability of a hold-up and a lecture. In a few minutes I was in my room with the door locked, and in a few minutes more I was in bed and oblivious to the world.

VIII

WHOSE BABY ARE YOU?

WHEN I awoke in the late morning I was ashamed to think that I had slept so soundly when the function or duty of a husband and father, under the circumstances, was to wake at intervals and make inquiries as to the wife and son, whom he was not permitted to see. When I stepped out I met Miss de Villiers — sweet, smiling and faultlessly arrayed as ever. I was assured that all was well with my family and that everybody was resting, including Mrs. Bletcher. I said,

"Then it will do no harm for me to go into the chamber and gaze on my sleeping loved ones."

The light left the young woman's countenance, and she began to move towards the closed door of my wife's room.

"I regret to say that you can't go in there, Mr. Bobble."

"The doctor will be here soon, I understand; and, if I have his consent, then may I go in?" I asked.

For a moment she seemed offended. Then I fancy the ridiculousness of the situation appealed to her, for she smiled and I smiled, too. So, with a lighter heart than I had carried for many hours, I went to breakfast and sat down alone, for I did not feel like disturbing Mrs. Bletcher. Things began to taste good, for there was nothing now to cause anxiety, and the sole discomfort would be removed upon the arrival of the doctor, for assuredly he would grant me permission to enter my wife's chamber. As I rose from the table some one arrived and, just as I was thinking how convenient it was for the doctor to appear at this time, I learned that it wasn't Dr. Lilax at all, but his associate — a young man of rather insipid mien and inexpressive countenance, who had been sent as his superior was indisposed. I knew at a glance that this young fellow would be submissive and pliant, but I was egregiously mistaken. He said he would like to be obliging, but the rules of the profession were inexorable. In the kingdom of therapeutics an inferior had no rights which a superior was bound to respect. He did not dare violate the instructions of Dr. Lilax.

"That isn't so in law," I declared, with some warmth. "A young lawyer is as good as an old lawyer and sometimes a good deal better."

"When you take senior counsel, don't you defer to him and do just as he says?" he inquired.

"I never take senior counsel, my friend, for there isn't anything in the whole range of jurisprudence, from the smallest police court case to matters cognisable by the great tribunal in Washington, that I am not perfectly capable of handling unaided and alone."

This modest and moderate statement proved ineffectual. The substitute physician turned away and I, now discomfited and, I regret to say, somewhat angry, left the house for my office. I was petulant all day long, and accomplished nothing or, to be more exact, would have accomplished nothing, if there had been anything to do. At last I had sense enough to call up Dr. Lilax, and to inquire as to his condition. I was informed that his indisposition was over, and that, at half past five, he would visit the house. At five I entered the house myself, and lo! there was no Miss de Villiers waiting to receive me. Presently she came out of the kitchen — physically as comely as ever, but facially much less tranquil and serene. If she had been lifeless one would have said that she was a faultless replica of Hebe, for she was a cup-bearer, the vessel, I assumed, containing nourishment for Mrs. Bobble, probably gruel. Her greeting lacked the customary cordiality, and

she was about to pass me when I detained her for a moment with pressing inquiries, and, on receiving welcome assurances, I was glad to part with her, for I was still aggrieved; and besides I wanted to find out what had been going on in the kitchen. Lizzie's visage bore little evidence of a merry heart and a contented mind, if one may rely on eyes that glow like coals and lips rigidly compressed.

"I felt like ordering that Villain woman out, Mr. Bobble, but she must get things here just so often for poor Mrs. Bobble, and so I reposed myself as best I could."

"I certainly commend your course, Lizzie. I am glad that you restrained yourself, even if she did try to quarrel with you."

"She didn't quarrel with me, Mr. Bobble, but it is the putting on airs and the nosing about that I don't like. I got what she wanted and let her use the stove, but I can't stand the way she says 'Thank you' and 'Yes' and 'No.' She kind of drawls the words out as if she thought that I was poor trash — not fit to associate with. Then she's got eyes in the back of her head and sees everything that's going on. I see her look my kitchen over like a spy — well, any woman if she can get into your kitchen will do that — but the way she done it, just as much as to say 'Things

ain't ship-shape and clean.' It makes me more nervous and stirs me up more than a regular quarrel would do."

Lizzie again declared that, if it wasn't for Mrs. Bobble, she would give notice, and I pacified her with assurances of my confidence and with expressions of gratitude and praise.

I went to the sitting-room, and it wasn't long before I heard the door-bell ring. I was there in a moment; and so was Miss de Villiers, who I thought was upstairs.

"When I am at home, I always tend the door," I said.

"In houses in which I am employed, Mr. Bobble, I feel it my duty to let the doctor in when I know that he is at the door."

"I am bound on the same mission, Miss de Villiers, and will relieve you of the labour and responsibility."

The young woman stepped aside — reluctantly I thought. What was she there for — to tell the doctor that I was a nuisance, or just to demonstrate that she could be everywhere at one and the same time? I took the doctor into the sitting-room and, shutting the door to keep Miss de Villiers out, observed,

"I am greatly pleased, doctor, with the satisfactory condition of affairs in this house and am

deeply grateful to you for your part in promoting it. I would not for the world endanger the peace and physical well-being of my wife and heir, but do I look like a man whose presence is likely to occasion pain to the helpless and innocent?"

To address Dr. Lilax properly, you had to know him. He was a man of the old school — dignified, rather reserved in the society of his inferiors, that is his patients and their families, prone to verbosity only on subjects that touched his profession, and the most easily handled man in the world through the instrumentalities of flattery and acquiescence. The question I asked had been written out and committed to memory.

The doctor hesitated and I added,

"Your prime minister has denied me the privileges of my wife's chamber, and you may imagine my anguish and distress."

Dr. Lilax smiled. The allusion to the prime minister seemed to please him. He remarked,

"The perfection of clinical treatment is only attained by the conjunction of medical science and physical service. The discernment of the physician accentuates the intensity of his diagnosis, and the amplitude of his knowledge inspires and engenders the directions as to the use and application of curative remedies. To woman is intrusted

this application; a disciplined hand has replaced the leaden touch; and thus, while the diorism is apparent, it is in a certain sense lost in an indispensable coadjuvency."

"Doctor," I said, "you are extremely lucid. I am a lawyer and I have noticed that physicians, when called to give expert testimony, are always remarkably clear. I have never known a juror on such occasions to fall asleep."

And now I hesitated and then asked,

"Do I understand, doctor, that I can occasionally see my wife and baby?"

"Let me ask you a question, Mr. Bobble,—do you stay at home days or do you go to your office?"

I had thought that two fools were conversing. I now concluded that there was only one, and that the doctor was not the fool. I was conscious of a warm spot in the back of my neck. I might have said that, so far as business was concerned, I could stay at home a good deal of the time, and lose nothing thereby. I smiled, but it was an artificial smile.

"Doctor," I replied, "my professional engagements make me an exile from home, save during the few hours which elapse from the evening bell's stroke to the morning bell's call to breakfast. I am, however, handy about the house, make no

noise, have a light, elastic step, and occasion little trouble to the women folks."

"I see no reason then, Mr. Bobble, why you should be excluded from your wife's chamber, as you deprecate disorder and tumult and, for the present at least, are not likely to make more than a couple of visits a day."

I started for the door when he called me back.

"I wouldn't go up there now, Mr. Bobble. Better wait until I have made my visit. In the meantime I will tell Miss de Villiers that you are to be no longer excluded."

"Suppose, doctor, that she demands a written order, a pass or something of that sort. It would be inconvenient and, indeed, humiliating to have to show it and have it honoured every time I want to enter."

The doctor assured me that that precaution was not necessary. I waited at the foot of the staircase while he was above, and, when he descended, I greeted him with effusive cordiality, conducted him to the door and ushered him out with expressions of confidence in his ability and of admiration for his character, receiving, in exchange therefor, assurances of his most distinguished consideration. I went up the stair-case four steps at a time and noiselessly, too. There

was Miss de Villiers standing at the threshold — not dignified and defiant, but calm and cheerful. She was no longer the guardian of a closed portal, but the attendant at the "open door." I was very much of a gentleman. I smiled and briefly acknowledged her courtesy. I was glad that Mrs. Bletcher was resting, for I wanted the meeting with my wife to be unobserved, and I record with pleasure the fact that Miss de Villiers for once did not annoy me with her presence.

It cost me a struggle to obtain the mastery of my emotions, and a quick, sharp struggle, too, for there was only a moment for the exercise of volition. The reunion was like a meeting after the severance of years, and the joy was so transcendent that my pen, even if I were inclined, would prove inadequate to the recital. But my pen is not inclined, for the subject is too sacred to be revealed, and it shall now be dismissed for the portrayal of the first interview with my son and heir.

In one corner of the room where, I suppose, it would be least exposed to danger, provided that there could be such a thing as exposure to danger in a chamber like that, was a basket resting on two chairs, which faced each other. This receptacle, so profusely decorated with blue that

every interstice was concealed, thus rendering it necessary to approach and look into it in order to ascertain its contents, was the bassinet. Tumultuous as were my emotions, and boisterous as was the beating of my heart, yet I think that curiosity was the most insistent of all my sensations. What was the little fellow like? Did he resemble other babies I had seen,— pretty nearly all ears, unpleasantly moist about the lips, blemishes all over the face, eyes of a dull hue and a leaden expression, little tuft of hair on top of the head, and emitting gurgling sounds like an automaton toy? As I advanced I noticed a card or tag attached to the bassinet, which puzzled me for a moment and begot some apprehension. I was relieved, however, on reading the harmless inscription, "Baby Bobble." Then I looked down upon the heir of my house, or my wife's house. The ears were symmetrical and of appropriate size, the lips were two rosy little lines and free from moisture, the countenance bore no blemishes and the complexion was remarkably clear for one newly born, the eyes were wide open, bright and really lustrous, the pate was bald and shone like the head of an alderman's cane, no tones issued from the mouth and the features were radiant with a smile.

Suddenly, and as silently as an apparition, the

nurse appeared. I was so transported — yes, jubilant, that I was ready to intrust my feelings and impressions even to her.

"Miss de Villiers," I said, "this is the most beautiful baby I ever saw."

"Yes," she declared, "he looks just like his mother."

Now I wasn't offended. I was delighted. The child did look like his mother and hence he couldn't help being beautiful. Miss de Villiers was disposed to be communicative and patronising. It was a kind of necessary infliction, and I submitted dutifully, joining myself in the conversation, which was carried on, of course, in whispers. Miss de Villiers began,

"This is the basquinet."

That's what she called it.

"Blue is the boy's colour," she added. I think she fancied that she was enlightening me, but she wasn't. I renewed my contemplation of the delicate object so prettily housed and so sweet and lovely in his helplessness and innocence. Suddenly I espied a tiny string around the boy's neck and attached to it a little card. I took it to be an amulet and assumed that the nurse was a sorceress; and I was stirred with a profound loathing, for I had nothing but contempt for witchcraft. On close scrutiny, however, I made out

the words written in a very fine hand —"Baby Bobble."

It is needless to say that I was puzzled, but Miss de Villiers was loquaciously helpful, although it took some time for me to comprehend her comments and explanations. Putting her finger on tag number two she said,

"This is something new; it was recently invented by a nurse in Philadelphia."

"I have no doubt, Miss de Villiers, of the originality of the conception — it looks to me as if it might have been invented by a Philadelphia lawyer — but I am so obtuse that I don't seem to understand it, nor do I take in the significance of the tag on the outside of the bassinet. Surely I don't have to be told that this little gem I am looking at is my baby."

"Of course not, Mr. Bobble, but the people don't know it."

I felt the hot blood jump into my cheeks and I inquired with all the vigour I could inject into a whispered tone, "Do the people have to be told of it, Miss de Villiers? Does anybody doubt that this is my baby?"

"I think I haven't made myself clear, Mr. Bobble. The question is one of identity. Baby Bobble mustn't get mixed up with other babies."

"But how can he get mixed up with other babies? He's the only baby in the room."

"Yes, Mr. Bobble, but don't you see that other babies might be brought in, and then, if your little boy didn't have this tag attached to his neck, we might not be able to identify him, and, if we didn't have the other tag on the basquinet, we might put him in the wrong basquinet and so we might never be able to tell him from the others."

"But who is likely to bring a baby into the house, Miss de Villiers? I can fancy a waif being left at the door, but surely no one would take the trouble or have the effrontery to bring an infant in here, unless, perhaps, Mrs. Evenball and the Prunes; and they would first have to borrow or steal one, for they haven't any of their own."

"We must take every precaution, Mr. Bobble. We are so trained in the hospital. It's the method, the system, you know."

"I suppose it's all right," I added. "Precaution is protection; and yet I can't conceive how another baby can get into this room unless it drops from heaven."

"Don't all babies come from heaven, Mr. Bobble?" she inquired.

I had not thought the woman capable of such tenderness, and I answered her question with a smile of approval. Then I bent over the bas-

sinet with the intention of kissing the child, but I was thwarted by the nurse.

"Excuse me, but you mustn't do that," she said.

"Can't I kiss my own child?"

"Not until you have shaved off your moustache, Mr. Bobble. The hairs are likely to irritate the baby and they are also supposed to harbour germs."

A man will take things from a woman which he will not take from a man. I had possessed my hirsute treasure since my twentieth year, and never before had it been belittled and defamed as the retreat of germs or as the abode of disease. I sometimes appear serene and happy when I am irritated and perturbed. I determined to shame the nurse and that, too, with an excess of decorous deportment and in a voice so modulated as not to betray my real feelings.

"Miss de Villiers," I observed, "I must say that every precaution is admirable and meritorious, but if I were in your place, I would go further. Why should not the mother be protected as well as the child? Don't you think you had better attach to the bed a card with Mrs. Bobble's name on it? You see some other woman, who has just become a mother, might be brought in here, and I should go distracted if she

should get mixed up with my wife and I was never able to tell one from the other."

"An excellent idea, Mr. Bobble, but we never had that plan laid before us in the hospital. It isn't yet the method, the system, you know."

Miss de Villiers stepped to the bureau and began to arrange the articles on it. I left the room and went to my office.

IX

FATHER AND CHILD DOING WELL

MOTHER and child continued to improve and prosper according to the laws of nature and under the care and attention of Miss Eleanor Aubrey de Villiers. All the credit, however, was given this young creature with the high-toned name, and poor old nature was left out in the cold. The doctor even was ignored, that is, he came in for little share in the encomiums; but, nevertheless, during his brief visits, the supremacy of his authority was unquestioned and the acquiescence and obedience of the nurse were conclusive evidence. But in his absence how she lorded it over everybody and how the whole house was subject to her order and whim! Yet let me say that during the three weeks of her sojourn with us she never exhibited the slightest temper upon any occasions, never raised her voice above an ordinary tone and never did a rude, vulgar or unwomanly thing. Lizzie was compelled to succumb; her subjection was

complete. "I don't know how it is, Mr. Bobble," she said, "but, somehow, I've had to give in. I've lost my spunk when that woman's 'round. I can't talk and I do my work kind of funny like, just as if a witch had me."

There was something distressing in the young woman's ubiquity. She seemed to be in the sick-room, the kitchen and the dining-room at one and the same time. I seemed conscious of an atmospheric affinity, or perhaps, coercion — I don't know what to call it. I seemed to be deprived of volition and individuality, but I didn't abandon my vocations or domestic duties. I seemed, however, to do things mechanically. We had an old-fashioned clock which emitted an almost sonorous sound. At the table I ate my food in obedience to its mandate, and, whenever I walked about, my foot-steps were in unison with its impressive tick.

There were two places, in which I was secure. One was the cellar, the other my bedroom. I used to go to bed with the serenest sensation of immunity. But in the cellar, which I was wont to visit to look after the furnace, I was somewhat apprehensive as to my personal freedom. I would look into the coal-bin and into nooks and corners to see if the trained nurse wasn't hiding there. But fortunately I never found her. My wife's chamber was the cynosure of my constant

thought, and, whenever I entered it, the mother and babe alike awoke sensations which were enriched by the contemplation of their innocence and helplessness and dependence. But somehow I felt like an intruder.

Miss de Villiers seemed bent on never allowing me to be alone with my wife and baby. When I came home at night I would kiss Mrs. Bobble and then, having taken the boy in my arms, would address him in terms of endearment, keeping a weather eye all the time on the nurse. I would put my face down very near to the little fellow's lips, without touching them. I was averse to parting with any of the germs, but once, however, I got an opportunity and I availed myself of it. Miss de Villiers happened to turn away, and I stole a kiss. There was a remonstrance — at least a cry like a wail. Miss de Villiers turned round and added a voiceless expostulation — it was evidenced by a slight modification of the hue of the cheek and a deeper glow to the eyes. She put out her arms rather imperiously, and I transferred my charge to their keeping. Then I left the room. Mrs. Bobble told me afterwards that immediately I had departed, Miss de Villiers applied a disinfectant to the baby's lips.

I remember one evening about two weeks after the great joy came to our home, I stepped into

the kitchen — it was just before dinner — and saw the nurse preparing something for my wife. I said to myself, " I'll steal upstairs and see my dear ones just as if they belonged to me and before the nurse gets there." Soon I was at the door, and there was the nurse. I was greatly perturbed. For a moment I thought it was an apparition, then I was assured that it was the real thing.

" Miss de Villiers," I stammered. " Have you a twin sister? I just saw a young woman in the kitchen, who seemed to be your counterpart. I thought it was you. If it was and you reached here before me, you must have passed through partitions and other physical objects like ether in wireless telegraphy."

The nurse appeared surprised and a little offended.

" I haven't been in the kitchen for an hour, and, as for a sister, I never had one, Mr. Bobble."

" I'm somewhat bewildered." I declared.

There came a voice from the bed.

" I'm greatly troubled about your health, Rufus, and I'm afraid that you may break down, unless you have a rest. Think of what you have passed through during the last two weeks. Now do go away somewhere and have a good time. I think your business may be able to stand it."

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"I agree with you, Nellie, as to my business. I think it may be able to stand it. And I agree with you, too, about my health. I'm in a precarious condition. I've been through so much during the last fort-night that I wonder that I haven't collapsed, and I envy you, Nellie, lying there in bed, doing nothing and enjoying yourself. I always did want to be a woman, women have such an easy time of it. I was so unfortunate as to be born a man. But at the same time I'm grateful for your solicitude as to my welfare, and I believe I will go away for a while and recuperate."

I might multiply instances of the vigilance of Miss de Villiers in guarding her charge's chamber from intruders and in keeping us all in an indefinable thrall. Let me, however, do justice to the young woman. I applaud her loyalty, her diligence, her efficiency, her devotion. Surely, we could not have got along without her. I gladly parted with the money I gave her, and I parted with her company without compunctions or regret. My wife cried some, but the baby and I shed no tears. A month or more elapsed, and one evening the little fellow became so boisterous that he had to be taken up. His mother walked the floor with him, and I sat in a chair and gave directions as to the best method of consoling and

quieting him. When the turmoil had ceased and the little eyes closed, Mrs. Bobble sat down, and I fixed my gaze on a picture which defied portraiture.

"What are you thinking of?" she inquired.

"I am thinking, my dear, of you and that lovely babe. I would that I had the artist's touch or the poet's power. I have, however, the appreciative soul of a devotee, and you may read in my eyes that soul's fervid homage. And what are you thinking of, my dear?"

"I am thinking of Miss de Villiers. I can hardly repay her, Rufus, for all her thought and service. Wouldn't it be fine if we only had the money to keep her with us always?"

"Oh! it would be splendid, Nellie. And I would be willing to give her lots of long vacations and have her pay go on just the same, as if she were with us."

"You are a good man, Rufus," said my wife tenderly.

"Thank you, my dear," I remarked, "but I knew that before."

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